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ABSTRACT

A survey of 47 Pennsylvania school districts examined the traits of deference and authoritarianism among educators and investigated the relationship between these two psychological qualities and school administrative promotion. Questionnaires returned by 493 school administrators and teachers measured each respondent's degrees of authoritarianism and deference and recorded data on their sex, age, marital status, organizational rank, and educational experience. The results showed that school administrators at higher organizational levels were not more authoritarian. They also showed that deferent individuals tended to be authoritarian and, more important, of high organizational rank. Further, although women tended to be more deferent than males, they were significantly under-represented among school administrators, indicating a possible sex bias in the selection of administrators. (Author/RW)

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THE ROLE OF AUTHORITARIANISM AND DEFERENCE IN THE SELECTION OF SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS

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Introduction

For more than a quarter of a century school administrators have been admonished in their in-service and pre-service training programs to be democratic, participative and open in the administration of schools. During the same period school administrators have continued to be characterized in novels, cartoons, television series and movies, as well as by the NEA and AFT, as authoritarian, domineering and closed minded in their administrative practices. Recognizing that no characterization is either totally correct or totally without foundation, it seems fair to inquire how more than 25 years of training practices have failed to be more successful in producing school administrators who are open minded and democratic.

One of the typical characterizations is the school administrator who is totally dominant when interacting with teachers, demanding exact obedience; yet disgustingly deferent to school board members who occasionally enter "his" building. Again we do not propose this as reality but contend that myth, while not reality, is always based on some empirical facts. In this stereo-

*See Fallinger (1980).

type, the character is also congruent with some evidence and theory of human personality. Deference (to authority) is related to authoritarianism (toward subordinants)!

Rationale

This study is based on two lines of research, one relating authoritarianism with deference and the other describing a system of selection and promotion in educational systems based on subordinate "GASing" and superordinate sponsorship (Griffiths, 1965). Here again we find a mergence of a kind of reality and theoretical assumptions. If deference is related to authoritarianism in the same person, it would seem likely that the same teacher who deferred to superordinates in the hierarchy as a teacher (volunteering for extra duty, agreeing with the opinions of administrators, willing to accept menial and sometimes demeaning tasks) would also be a person who, after promoted to a position of authority would exhibit an authoritarian personality as an administrator (demanding deference, exhibiting closed mindedness and operating as a despot). The very persons selected for promotion because they exhibited a willingness to cooperate, take suggestions and criticism in a positive fashion without making any demands as subordinates, also could be the persons likely to assert their own beliefs as the only position, demand obedience, and operate in a punitive fashion as superordinates. A person who is a deferent subordinate is likely to be an authoritarian superordinate because deference and authoritarianism are both high when one is high. If the deferent's behavior of "GASing" is a very helpful, if not necessary, element for sponsorship and promotion -- then deference is a first step to promotion. And deference is related to authoritarianism!

Hypothesis

If the above senario is correct, the following hypotheses would be expected to be supported:

HO_1: Teachers perceived by their principals as most promotable (those likely to be recommended or sponsored for promotion) are higher in deference than teachers not perceived as most promotable.

HO_2: Principals perceived by their superintendent as most promotable (those likely to be recommended or sponsored for promotion) are higher in deference than principals not perceived as most promotable.

HO_3: The higher the level in the organization, the higher the degree of deference and authoritarianism will be (because deferent people tend to be promoted and also tend to be authoritarian).

Finally, it could be argued that this theoretical prospective and organizational process tends to be cross culturally relevant for White (1980) argues that:

> Personality tract terms symbolize enduring behavioral characteristics of individuals, usually in terms of motive dispositions and/or interpersonal interaction. In doing so, they organize expectations about social interaction and can be used to describe and explain individual behavior (Ibid p. 761).

Of particular consequence to the argument made by White based on "Conceptual Universals" are his conclusions regarding the "universals" he dealt with - solidarity/conflict and dominance/submission.

> The consistent appearance of these dimensions cross-culturally suggests that the conceptual scheme is a product of the interaction of universal psycholinguistic structures and contain panhuman conditions of social life, such as the potential for concord or discord in the goals and actions autonomous individuals (solidarity/conflict) and for one individual to influence the plans and actions of another (dominance/submission). (Ibid p. 776).

Thus we undertook the research authoritarianism (dominance) and deference (submission) with considerable enthusiasm born of some personal observations, empirical evidence, theoretical support, and the possibility of rather broad generalizations.

Research Design

The population from which this sample was drawn included all 47 school districts in Intermediate Units #12 and #13 in Pennsylvania. Samples of superintendents, principals and teachers were drawn from these districts. A fourth sample was drawn from students enrolled in the school administration certification programs at The Pennsylvania State University.

Of the 47 possible superintendents, 35 agreed to participate. They identified a sample of 31 "most promotable" principals and 128 principals not so identified. These principals identified a group of 142 "most promotable" teachers and 137 not so identified. A group of 35 potential principal candidates were identified who were taking principal certification courses at The Pennsylvania State University during the Spring Term, 1980, who agreed to participate in this study.

Data were collected using a questionnaire devised to collect (a) personal information about the respondent, (b) the respondent's level of deference, and (c) their tendency toward authoritarianism. The Status Obeisance Scale (Hesel, 1971) was modified and used to measure deference. This modified 20 item scale produced a Cronbach Alph Index of reliability of .916. An Educational Authoritarian Scale (Ed. A Scale) was developed to measure authoritarianism using questions from the Dogmatism Scale (Form E) (Rokeach, 1960); the Gough-Stanford Rigidity Scale (Gough and Stanford, 1952); and the Authoritarian F Scale (Form 45-40) (Adorno et al, 1950). A Cronbach Alph Index of reliability of .871 was obtained for the combined 24 item scale. All data were gathered via mailed questionnaires.

Tests for homogeneity of variance of samples were conducted; t tests were used to test hypotheses one and two and a one-way analysis of variance was used to test hypothesis three. Additionally, the relationship between deference and authoritarianism within each sample was determined through the use of Pearson Product Moment Correlation. The .05 level of significance was required in order to reject the null form of the hypotheses.

Results

Hypothesis one, that teachers perceived by principals as most promotable would exhibit more deference than teachers not so perceived was not supported by the data. Table 1 summarizes those data.

Table 1

DEFERENCE IN MOST PROMOTABLE VS. OTHER TEACHERS

Groups	n	Mean Deference	df	t	Sig.
Most Promotable Teachers	131	68.1	1/465	.581	N.S.
Other Teachers	125	67.1			

Hypothesis two, that principals perceived by superintendents as most promotable would exhibit more deference was not supported by the data. Table 2 summarizes those data.

Table 2

DEFERENCE IN MOST PROMOTABLE VS. OTHER PRINCIPALS

Groups	n	Mean Deference	df	t	Sig.
Most Promotable Principals	31	79.55	1/158	.067	N.S.
Other Principals	128	80.80			

The third hypothesis, that the higher a person's position in the bureaucratic hierarchy the greater their level of deference was supported by the data. Table 3 summarizes those data.

Table 3

AMOUNT OF DEFERENCE RELATIVE TO RANK IN ORGANIZATION

Source of Variance	df	Σ of Square	$\bar{X}$ Squares	F	Sig.
Between groups	3	19,369.09	6,456.36	31.12	>.001
Within groups	503	10,537.28	207.50		
Total	506	123,739.31			

Part two of the third hypothesis suggested that the higher a person's rank in the organization, the higher their authoritarianism would be. This hypothesis was tested by a one-way analysis of variance producing an F ratio

of 2.33 with a significance level of .07. Therefore, the null hypothesis was not rejected. However, the distribution of means may be of interest to the reader.

Table 4

DISTRIBUTION OF AUTHORITARIANISM BY ORGANIZATIONAL ROLES

Role	n	Mean
Superintendents	34	71.03
Principals	159	76.81
Teachers	279	77.63
Principal Candidates	35	79.97

While this F ratio was not significant, the rank order is interesting and suggests some future hypotheses. For instance, principal candidates are the highest in authoritarianism and were also the highest in deference of all groups. It is this group from which future principals will be selected. Assuming this condition was stable in the past, why then are principals not more deferent and authoritarian than teachers, which the data indicate they are not. Two answers suggest themselves: (1) Perhaps training programs root out the most authoritarian candidates or perhaps those programs make individuals less authoritarian, or at least less likely to appear so on paper and pencil measures; (2) perhaps the selection process itself roots out (fails to choose) the most authoritarian candidates, or being in the administrative role for some period of time accomplishes that feat

or makes principals less likely to appear authoritarian on paper and pencil measures.

Ancillary Findings

In addition to the tests of the hypotheses, several other analyses of the data were completed. Twice as many male teachers were in the most promotable category as female teachers. This same three-to-one ratio between males and females existed among the self selected principal candidate group pursuing principal certificates. However, females comprised only 8% of the principal group (as compared to 31% of the principal candidate sample) and only 3% of those principals perceived as most promotable. Given that principals were found to be more deferent than teachers and that the total female sample was found to be higher in deference than the male groups, the question of why females are under-selected seems relevant. On the surface a hypothesis of sex bias in principalship selection, while not supported by the data, is clearly suggested by it.

Multivariant analyses were done using both major variables (deference and authoritarianism) as separate criterion variables with the alternative major variable and selected demographic variables as predictors. These included sex, age, marital status, school district identification, years of education, organizational role, and years in district.

Combining all subjects, 22% of the variance in deference could be accounted for by the variables of authoritarianism, years in education, and years in the district. Table 5 describes those data.

Table 5

VARIABLES ACCOUNTING FOR DEFERENCE IN TOTAL SAMPLE

Order of Entry	Variable	R	R^2	Beta Weight at Step 3
1	Authoritarianism*	.33	.11	.346
2	Years in education*	.44	.19	.469
3	Years in district*	.47	.22	-.234

*Sig.> .001

The data suggests that educators who are high in deference are also high in authoritarianism, have longer service in education, but shorter service in their present district, than are those who are lower in deference.

Authoritarianism was also used as a criterion variable. Table 6 presents those data.

Table 6

VARIABLES ACCOUNTING FOR AUTHORITARIANISM IN TOTAL SAMPLE

Order of Entry	Variable	R	R^2	Beta Weight at Step 3
1	Deference*	.33	.11	.382
2	Age*	.37	.13	-.142
3	Degree Held*	.39	.15	-.125

*Sig.> .001

A total of 15% of the variance in authoritarianism could be accounted for by the variables of deference, the individual's age and their degree held. Deference as expected was positively related to authoritarianism. However, contrary to some popular belief, age was negatively related to authoritarianism and the higher one's earned degree the lower level of authoritarianism they exhibited. Thus, more deferent, younger and less educated persons in the sample were more authoritarian.

Conclusions

Our assumption that more deferent teachers are more likely to be selected as most promotable to the principalship (i.e. sponsored) by principals was not supported. Nor were the most deferent principals perceived as most promotable. Yet when examining deference among groups (i.e. teachers, principals and superintendents), deference was significantly different across groups with higher roles exhibiting the more deferent tendencies. It, therefore, seems true that educators who are higher in deference do get promoted.

Our notion that the higher one's rank in the educational hierarchy the higher authoritarianism would be was not substantiated. There were no significant differences in authoritarianism across groups. Yet it seems unfair to stop there. More problematic to our original hypothesis is the fact that the F ratio approached significance and the direction was opposite our prediction. Superintendents were the lowest in tendencies toward authoritarianism and teachers higher than any other group with the exception of those teachers who were in administrative certification programs. Thus superintendents were highest in deference and lowest in authoritarianism, while teachers were lowest in deference and highest in authoritarianism. This finding flies in the face of all the research, including this research, that deference and authoritarianism are related and requires some speculation.

Apparently teachers themselves are rather high in authoritarianism. Those teachers who were in our sample of persons in administrative certification programs were very high in this personality trait. Further, while those selected as most promotable were, as a group, not more deferent than those not selected, those promoted (who are principals) were more deferent than those not promoted (are not principals). As deference was the best predictor of authoritarianism (in our study), one would not expect to discover low authoritarianism among the highly deferent administrators. But it is clear, if they are somewhat authoritarian, they are not as authoritarian as the myth would suggest. In fact, they do not appear to be as authoritarian as the teachers they supervise.

Specific Conclusions from this Research

1. There was a positive and statistically significant relationship between deference and authoritarianism in the educational professionals in this sample.

2. There was a positive relationship between the rank of the professional in the bureaucratic hierarchy and the deference of the individual. The higher the position, the greater the deference (i.e. superintendents had the highest deference scores).

3. There was no significant relationship between authoritarianism and rank in the hierarchy.

4. The prospective principal candidate pool (those individuals preparing themselves for the principal's certificate and from which principals must be selected) were the highest of all groups in deference and authoritarianism.

5. When analyzed by sex, females were significantly higher in deference than males but significantly under-chosen as school administrators. That fact is in conflict with the fact that the best predictor of promotability in the study was high deference.

Educational Significance

1. We did not find that administrators in the higher levels of the educational organizations also had high authoritarian tendencies. This in spite of the fact those persons are the highest in deference. Several explanations present themselves. There may be a socialization process that "teaches" educators as they move up the ladder to be deferent but:
   (1) not to behave in authoritarian fashions (at least very often), or
   (2) to respond to paper and pencil measures so as to avoid the appearance of authoritarianism.

2. There is a sex bias operating in educational administration that favors men in the face of the fact that deference seems to be an excellent predictor of promotability and women are the most deferent of the sample.

3. The fact that deference to authority (as predicted) was related to rank in the educational hierarchy raises serious questions about the selection process in education leading to promotion into the ranks of educational administration.

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